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ED 502 Teaching Reading
07-13-93
Journal Articles: Twelve Easy Ways to Make Learning to Read Difficult, by Frank Smith.

Excellent article---there were so many thoughts that popped into my mind as I rambled through Smith's indictment of the "twelve rules" he'd gathered from various sources. The fact that these twelve sound so familiar and well-intentioned made his review all the more chilling.

One of the previous articles on curriculum that I had read made an issue about de-emphasizing "correctness" and allowing "failure" to be a positive element of the educational process. Smith echoes this idea when he discusses the issue of risk and unrealistic expectations placed on beginning readers ("Make Word-Perfect Reading the Prime Objective" and "Insist Upon Accuracy"). I can really see this at work when I'm working with my student. He refuses to say the word until he's 100-percent sure that he's got the right word. Consequently, any sentence-flow and its attendant meaning are lost in the concerted effort to product 100-percent "word-perfect" read text.

The twelfth "rule" had me curious. By its title I was wondering if he was advocating a position that once a curriculum path has been selected that the teacher should stick to it and not bounce around from "method" to "method" (so much for my powers of prediction). Not! Ah-h-h, (60-watt bulb over my head flickers uneasily), it's not a criticism of teachers looking for the best way to help their student(s) but quite the opposite---making the student(s) subject to the latest "kit" or "method"

(lord knows, I have to regularly replace the damn 60-watt-er because I keep burning the sucker out trying to come up with new ideas).

One idea that came to me (flicker, flicker . . .) was that I needed to find or produce (hint, hint) a short narrative that would engage my resolutely disinterested student. It would have to be something that he could appropriate, given his world view and engage his sense of humor. The second part of this idea (flicker . . .) is that rather than have him sweat out reading out loud to me, I'd have him read the passage quietly to himself (flicker, pop!). Afterward comprehension can be tested in the usual re-telling fashion and hopefully we could expand on the story a little and get into some higher levels of learning. Anyway, I have to try to remember where I left my box of bulbs and get on with these ideas. Hatta

A student of mine in 6th grade could not read out loud at all and hence was put in resource for project read (t·h·e·r·e - there!) However, when he read silently he had perfect comprehension. Also, Remember Dana!

You've completed 8 articles

2
Twelve Easy Ways to Make Learning to Read Difficult*

*and One Difficult Way to Make it Easy

I have collected a dozen precepts on the topic of how to teach reading. The list is set out, concisely tabulated in a form suitable for framing, in the table below. I make no claim to originality

Twelve Rules for Reading Teachers

1. Aim for early mastery of the rules of reading.
2. Ensure that phonic skills are learned and used.
3. Teach letters or words one at a time, making sure each new letter or word is learned before moving on.
4. Make word-perfect reading the prime objective.
5. Discourage guessing; be sure children read carefully.
6. Insist upon accuracy.
7. Provide immediate feedback.
8. Detect and correct inappropriate eye movements.
9. Identify and give special attention to problem readers as soon as possible.
10. Make sure children understand the importance of reading and the seriousness of falling behind.
11. Take the opportunity during reading instruction to improve spelling and written expression, and also insist on the best possible spoken English.
12. If the method you are using is unsatisfactory, try another. Always be alert for new materials and techniques.

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for my specimens. In fact, I have chosen them because they have such widespread currency; they are part of the conventional wisdom. They might not be considered out of place displayed on the staff room wall as a model of exemplary practice, or enshrined in the pages of manuals for teachers (which is where I found most of them in the first place).

Some of my twelve precepts are venerable to the point of senility. I shall examine them one by one, and indicate why each in its own way may be regarded as a potential and powerful method of interfering in the process of learning to read.

1. Aim for Early Mastery of the Rules of Reading

This rule is absurd because there are no rules of reading, at least none that can be specified with sufficient precision to teach a child. All proficient readers have acquired an implicit knowledge of how to read, but this knowledge has been developed through the practice of reading, not through anything that is taught in school. The learning process is identical with that by which infants develop a set of internal rules for producing and comprehending spoken language without the benefit of any formal instruction. And just as no linguist is able to formulate a complete and adequate set of grammatical rules that could be used to program a computer (or a child) to use spoken language, so no theorist has yet achieved anything like an adequate insight into the knowledge that people acquire and use when they become fluent readers.

But even if we did have a clearer understanding of the reading process, it would be doubtful whether anyone should try to give this understanding directly to children. After all, millions of children have learned to read in the past without any profound insight on the part of their instructors into what the children were learning to do. There is absolutely no evidence that teaching grammar helps a child to learn to speak, and none that drills in phonics or other nonreading activities help the development of reading. It is not difficult to argue that mastery of phonics develops only to the extent that reading proficiency is acquired, just as grammar is a meaningful and useful subject (if at all) only to those who already know how to use language.

Typically, what are called "rules of reading" are hints or slogans for reading instruction. Learning to read is not a matter of mastering rules. Children learn to read by reading.

2. Ensure that Phonic Skills Are Learned and Used

A prominent aspect of the "reading by rules" fallacy is the notion that reading ability depends on a knowledge of spelling-to-sound correspondences. (In its less sophisticated form, this notion merely asserts that children must learn the "sounds of letters" without any realization of just how complex and unpredictable spelling-to-sound correspondences are.) But reading is not accomplished by decoding to sound; meaning must usually be grasped before the appropriate sounds can be produced, and the production of sounds alone does not give meaning. Decoding directly from letters to sound is unnecessary as well as inefficient.

It quickly becomes obvious to anyone who gives more than passing attention to the actual process of reading that fluent readers do not translate written symbols into sound in order to understand what they are reading. Nevertheless, it is frequently argued that a mastery of phonics must surely be essential for children; otherwise, how would they ever learn to recognize words that they had not met in print before, words that are not in their "sight vocabulary?" There are two good reasons why the last resort of a child in such circumstances should be to turn to phonics.

The first objection to phonics as a way of reading is that it is conspicuously unreliable and cumbersome. Studies at the Southwest Regional Laboratory for Educational Development showed that 166 rules would be required to account for the most frequent correspondences in just 6000 one- and two-syllable words in the vocabulary of 6- to 9-year-olds—and these 166 rules would still not account for over 10 percent of the most common words which would have to be excluded as "exceptions." There is no rule for predicting which of many alternative rules should apply on any particular occasion, any more than there are rules for determining which words are exceptions. The rules often cannot be applied unless one is aware of the meaning and syntactic role of the word and the way it carries stress. In other words, phonics is easy provided one knows what a word is in the first place.

The very complexity and indeterminacy of such a system makes it remarkable that anyone should expect children ever to try to learn it. Nevertheless, many educators believe that teaching at least an arbitrary part of the system is the answer to "the reading problem." But even if children were gifted and gullible enough to learn such a system, there is absolutely no evidence that they could ever actually use it in the process of reading. Quite the reverse, it is easy to show that any attempt to read by translating letters to sounds through the application and integration of phonic rules could result only in catastrophic overloading of short-term memory. Besides, the use of spelling-to-sound rules to identify words is as absurd as clipping a lawn with

nail scissors. Far more efficient and economical alternatives are available.

This leads to the second objection to the phonics fallacy, namely that sounding out words letter by letter (or the even more complicated task of identifying and articulating "letter clusters") is the last resort of the fluent reader, a fact already known by most children whose natural perception of reading has not been distorted in the process of reading instruction.

3. Teach Letters or Words One at a Time, Making Sure Each New Letter or Word Is Learned Before Moving On

There is a widespread misconception that many children have trouble learning the names of objects and words and letters, and that only constant repetition will help to fix a name in a child's mind. This view is based on an oversimplification of learning. There are two quite distinct aspects of any name-learning task, the first being to discover how to differentiate the named object or type of object from all other objects—which is essentially a concept formation problem—and the second to discover and associate that concept with its name. By far the more difficult of the two parts of the task is the first—discovering the rules that differentiate categories. Name-associating itself seems so easy as to be almost trivial. Children in the first 6 years of life learn perhaps a dozen new words, most of them "names," every day, often in a single trial (Miller, 1977).

The manner in which children learn how to define the category to which a name belongs is instructive. They look at the situation in which the name seems to be applied and try to extract some features that will mark the situation so that they will recognize it in the future. They look for, but do not ask to be told, some *rules* that will specify the defining characteristics of the category. They construct "hypotheses" about what the concept is. We can get an idea of what these hypotheses are by looking at the errors that children make. If, for example, they call all and only four-legged animals "dog," then we may conclude that their current hypothesis is that "dog" simply means four-legged animals. If they apply the name to four-legged animals and tables, we can assume that animation is not one of their hypotheses. If they call only their own dogs "dog," they are undergeneralizing.

Children can generate hypotheses only by comparing examples of the category being named with nonexamples of the same category. It is as important to be aware of four-legged animals that are not called "dog" as to see some others that are. Children can modify their hypotheses only by testing them and receiving feedback. They learn practically nothing if they are simply shown a dog and told "That is a dog," except perhaps that a category named "dog" exists. They learn only when they can compare what is a dog with other objects that (to them) might be but are not dogs. More specifically, they learn when they discover that objects that they would not call "dog" (according to their hypotheses) are in fact dogs, and that objects that they would call "dog" (according to their hypotheses) are in fact not dogs.

A similar situation applies when children approach the task of learning the names of letters or words. Simply to be shown the letter *H* over and over again, while being told "This is an 'h,'" is not going to help them discover what *H* is. They are still quite likely to call a *K* "h" and perhaps *H* "k." Instead they must find out how *H* and *K* are different, which means first that they must see them together (or at least have a chance to hypothesize what makes *H* different from *K*) and second have a chance to test their hypotheses about the difference between the two.

The manner in which letter and word names are learned is just one of several critical issues involved in understanding the task confronting children when they learn to read. Learning to distinguish among letters and words is an obvious case in which there are "rules" to be learned in reading, but these are not rules that we can teach. They are like the rules we learn for distinguishing cats and dogs or for spoken language—rules that we have acquired without instruction and cannot talk about. Instead children learn by being given the evidence, positive and negative, and also the opportunity to test their theories for themselves.

4. Make Word-Perfect Reading the Prime Objective

There is another reason why emphasis should not be put on the learning or identification of words in isolation, and this is that it is the most difficult way to do it. All fluent readers use other cues when they are required to read letters or words. It is much easier to identify a letter when it occurs in a word, or a word when it appears in a meaningful sentence, than when it is standing alone. As I have already pointed out, the identification of individual words is not the most important part of reading. Far more visual information is required to identify words standing alone (or as if they were standing alone) than to identify words in a sentence. Because of the information-processing limitations of our visual system and working memory, it is the handling of large amounts of visual information that makes reading difficult. One of the most important parts of learning to read is learning to use as little visual information as possible.

Fluent readers do not read words, they read meanings. Reading for meaning is far easier than reading words. Children seem to know this instinctively, no doubt because of the strain that reading every word puts on their information-processing capacities.

5. Discourage Guessing; Be Sure Children Read Carefully

I have already referred to the role of hypotheses in the identification of unfamiliar words. I have also referred to the need to spend as little time as possible lingering over every word. Efficient readers make maximum use of a minimum of visual information. Reading for meaning is easier than reading for words. There is another critical factor that I have not yet mentioned: reading quickly is easier than reading slowly. What all the preceding distills down to is that "reading carefully" is not efficient reading, and reading without anticipating is not reading at all. Goodman (1970) has aptly termed reading "a psycholinguistic guessing game." In order to read, one must predict, not recklessly but on an informed basis. Informed guessing means making the best use of nonvisual information, of what one already knows. More precisely, in order to read one must constantly form expectations that reduce the uncertainty of what one is reading, and therefore reduce the amount of visual information required to extract its meaning (see chapter 3).

We all know that when reading an unfamiliar or difficult text, whether a complex novel, a technical article, or something in a fairly unfamiliar foreign language, it is impossible to read and simultaneously refer to a dictionary, or to slog through the text a sentence at a time. We may be tempted to slow down, but the only efficient strategy is, in fact, to speed up, to read on. When it is necessary to "read carefully" for one reason or another, we do not try to do it cold. Instead we take a quick scan through the material "to see what it is about"—which means to get the essence of the meaning—and then read through a second time, still relatively fast, to get the details.

An important generalization reveals itself through a number of the observations that I have made so far—that *reading provides its own cues*. The best way to discover the meaning of a difficult passage is to read more of the passage. The best way to identify an unfamiliar word in text is to draw inferences from the rest of the text. The best way to learn the strategies and models for identifying new words "by analogy" is to read. Any instructional method that interferes with reading must almost certainly interfere with learning to read.

6. Insist Upon Accuracy

Learning cannot take place without error. We cannot learn to use names correctly, for animals, letters, or words, unless we accept the possibility of being "wrong." Children must take the risk of using a word incorrectly in order to find out whether the rules they have for identifying or using that word are correct; they must use their rules in order to get feedback. I have also argued that reading is highly dependent on guessing and that reading for meaning is both far easier and far more important than reading to identify words. Again it is obvious that children must be prepared to make errors; in fact, one of the greatest difficulties that a child can face in the process of learning to read is to be inhibited from responding because of the risk of being wrong.

There is no need for scientific evidence to demonstrate that learning is not possible unless we accept the chance of being wrong. If children know they are right before saying something, then the feedback that they are in fact right provides them with no information at all; they already know they were right. But if children make a response, if they name an object or venture an opinion about meaning, knowing that it is possible they might be wrong, then they will learn something whatever the outcome. If they happen to be "right," then they have confirmed their existing hypotheses. If they happen to be "wrong," then they have acquired some equally important information; they have learned that they must modify their hypotheses. That is the way children naturally try to learn—by testing hypotheses—provided, of course, that they have not been taught that society places a high premium on being right and that it is better to stay quiet than to be wrong. Adults who treat, or who encourage other children to treat, misreadings as stupidities, jokes, or transgressions do more than misperceive the basic nature of reading; they also block the principal way in which reading is learned.

7. Provide Immediate Feedback

Both good and poor beginning readers make errors, but they differ in the type of errors that they make. One difference between the good beginning reader and the one heading for trouble lies in the overreliance on visual information that inefficient, or improperly taught, beginning readers tend to show, at the expense of sense. The words they read may not make sense, but they look pretty much like the words on the page. The good reader, on the other hand, will get the sense of the passage but may omit, insert, or change a number of words. It is clear that the better readers barely look at the individual words on the page;

they minimize their use of visual information. The problem for the teacher is to distinguish between the two types of reader. It is easy enough for the teacher (or other children in the class) to jump on a child and give immediate feedback if a word is read incorrectly, but this feedback has no relevance if the child is not reading to identify words in the first place, but reading for meaning.

"Immediate feedback" is a dangerous rule to apply indiscriminately. It is necessary to know what feedback is being given for. Feedback implies answering a specific question. If the child is in fact practising individual word identification and wants to know "Is this word 'elephant'?" then immediate feedback may help (with a qualification that I shall mention in a moment). But if the child is reading to get the general meaning—which means reading fluently—then immediate feedback on words is more than just misplaced or irrelevant; it is disruptive.

There is a second important difference concerning the errors of good and poor beginning readers. Even good readers make occasional errors of meaning; they read anomalously. But a difference lies in what happens at the end of the sentence or passage, at the point where the anomaly should become apparent. Better readers will go back and self-correct; they have been paying attention to the meaning of what they read. But word-by-word readers will have no reason to go back and self-correct even if they have been producing absolute nonsense. They were not reading for meaning in the first place. There is a simple strategy, then, for distinguishing children who are reading for meaning from the others. Wait and see if they self-correct errors of meaning. Of course, the teacher who pounces on every misread word as soon as it is uttered will not have the opportunity of finding that out.

The preceding discussion leads to a second important generalization, that *reading provides its own feedback*. Provided we read for meaning, we can always check whether errors of interpretation, and even of word identification, have occurred.

8. Detect and Correct Inappropriate Eye Movements

An inappropriate eye movement means the reader is looking in the wrong place. This rarely occurs because there is something wrong with the reader's eyes, but rather because the reader does not know what to look for. Unless a child has a gross visual deficiency that manifests itself outside reading, there is little justification for blaming reading difficulties on visual defects or bad habits. Any child who can recognize a character on a television screen or spear a pea on a plate has the visual acuity and

control necessary to be able to read. But that does not mean the child will know where to look. Knowing where to look depends on the nonvisual skills of reading. Drilling the eyes to move blindly from one meaningless position to another is a pointless exercise.

9. Identify and Give Special Attention to Problem Readers as Soon as Possible

Very often far too much is required of early readers; they are expected to demonstrate skills beyond the capacity of fluent adult readers. Relevant examples that I have already mentioned concern the identification of unfamiliar words on the basis of spelling-to-sound rules alone and the requirement that reading aloud should be word-perfect. A third factor lies in the type of material children often are expected to read. Many primers bear absolutely no relevance to a child's particular life or language, and short sentences barely connected by a story line place a premium on word identification and provide little support for intelligent guessing. Subject matter texts that children are later expected to comprehend and appreciate often present an even worse obstacle. Teachers and other adults frequently expect children to read and learn from "resource material" so opaque and dull that it is doubtful whether the adults themselves could bear to read it, let alone learn from it. Furthermore, expectations about comprehension itself are far too high to be realistic. The proper distinction is not drawn between *understanding* what a sentence or passage or book is about, which means grasping the author's meaning, and *recall* of what was said, which is quite a different matter. While recall and understanding are related, in the sense that the former can rarely occur in the absence of the latter, committing detailed information to memory and retrieving it on a later occasion is a complex cognitive task that depends on much more than mere reading ability. There are very stringent limits on how much information can be put into long-term memory at any one time. In fact the requirement that a reader try to store in memory an unreasonably large amount of the information in a passage is a sure way to interfere with the process of reading altogether.

I mention the preceding points because there is a risk that children will be classified as reading problems when the only problem that exists lies in the unreasonable expectations of a parent or teacher, or of the system in which the teacher and child interact. Sometimes the problem lies in a complete misunderstanding of what constitutes good reading: "Johnny is above

average at comprehension but he persists in making careless errors with individual words." Reading and diagnostic tests are a very poor guide to reading ability in this respect. The materials and methods used to "measure" reading in fact only measure what can be measured—facility in an assortment of drills, rules, and "power" tasks that at best bear only a tangential relation to fluent reading.

Treating a child as a "special case" always carries a number of unpleasant side effects, particularly damaging in the case of reading. Being singled out all too often adds to a child's anxiety, increases tension, and leads to concentration on detail and even more apprehension about errors. Involvement with clinics and consultants scarcely contributes to the confidence required to read with the flexibility that makes comprehension possible. And if children continue to fall short of expectations despite the special attention they get when identified as a "problem," then the only way they can go is in the direction of further confusion, ultimately with the risk of being labelled minimally brain-damaged (which means "We really cannot understand why he does not benefit from our instruction").

I do not want to dwell on the moral, social, or personal implications of acting rashly in labelling a child as inadequate. But there is one practical consideration that should be taken into account. The remedial measures taken when children are identified as having a reading problem frequently result in their reading less than before. They spend more time on exercises, drills, tests, and interviews; more time trying to boost "conceptual skills" and general language ability (and even pronunciation) and less time actually reading. The difficulty before the "problem" was identified might well have been that the child was not doing enough reading in order to learn to read, yet the "cure" turns out to be even less reading experience.

10. Make Sure Children Understand the Importance of Reading and the Seriousness of Falling Behind

The only way to learn to read is with confidence and enjoyment. Once again I make the point not as a moral judgment but for purely practical reasons. Anything that makes reading difficult, or unpleasant, or threatening, makes learning to read more difficult. Lack of confidence, unwillingness to risk errors, and a reluctance to become *involved* in reading will all contribute to making learning to read impossible.

There is nothing reprehensible in falling behind one's classmates in reading instruction, and absolutely no damage can be done, except in terms of the school schedule and the expectations (and sometimes the egos) of adults. Reading is not learned competitively, and no convincing evidence exists that there is a critical age for learning to read. The most that can be said about a 7-year-old who is a year behind is that he reads like an average 6-year-old. This 1-year lag may be disconcerting for parents and teacher, but there is no sound psychological reason why it should be regarded as a precursor of educational catastrophe for the child. The notion is absurd that because 20 percent of a class of children read less fluently than the other 80 percent, remedial action should abolish the bottom 20 percent. The aim should obviously be that all children progress toward fluent reading, not that they should change place in relative ranks.

As I have indicated, tests are poor indicators of reading ability, partly because they are limited in what they measure, but largely because they are almost invariably based on a total misunderstanding of what reading involves. (My precepts 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and perhaps 11 could be interpreted as a large part of the test-maker's creed.) The purpose of reading is not to score high on reading tests, and progress in learning to read does not require keeping up with the neighbors.

11. Take the Opportunity During Reading Instruction to Improve Spelling and Written Expression, and Also Insist on the Best Possible Spoken English

Writing and reading involve several different systems of knowledge and skill. Knowledge of spelling is never used in the process of identifying a word, and words are frequently read for which the spelling is not known. (For this reason, the visual knowledge of how words should look may be used to test whether a written word has been spelled correctly.) Reading assists writing, but not vice versa. Apart from anything else, writing is too slow to do anything but interfere with the process of reading, just as the mechanics of the writing act can interfere chronically with children's expression of their thought. Even so, instruction in written language which aims at getting well-articulated thoughts onto paper very often finds itself more concerned with such disruptive side issues as "correct" spelling and grammar, formalized layout, page and paragraph numeration, and neatness. But the analogies between the disruptive precepts of "good reading instruction" and those of "good writing instruction" are too extensive to pursue here.

I am not saying that the obvious relations between reading and writing should be concealed, but only that the fragile process of

learning to read—of achieving that delicate balance between fidelity to the printed page and overcoming the strain that an overload of visual information places on eye and brain—should not be further complicated by introducing worries about handwriting or spelling.

Similarly, spoken English is largely irrelevant to reading. There can only be interference with learning to read if children must worry about how to pronounce what they read—literally a superficial aspect of reading. Children who read *I do not have any candy* as "I don't have no candy" have picked up all the significant features of meaning from the text and succeeded in translating them into their own thought and language. Expecting them to read word-perfectly not only confuses pedantry with reading, but also it will probably convey to children a completely distorted notion of what reading is. They may be deluded into requiring far more visual information from the text than any mature reader would be able to cope with.

One of the great advantages of conventional English spelling is that it appears to be maximally efficient for all dialects (Chomsky and Halle, 1968). The particular dialect that a child speaks makes no intrinsic difference to the basic task of learning to read. Printed materials are rarely anyone's spoken language written down. Of course, discrepancies among dialects may lead to communication and even sociocultural conflicts within the classroom, especially if the teacher expects the child to read word for word (which even the teacher would probably find difficult to do) or if every reading lesson is used as an occasion for undermining a child's native spoken language expression.

12. If the Method You Are Using Is Unsatisfactory, Try Another. Always Be Alert for New Materials and Techniques

The belief that improvement in reading instruction lies just around the corner in the form of another kit of drills, some new basal readers, or a cabinet of technological trickery, is based on an egregious educational fallacy. The belief rests upon the naive assumption that an ideal method of teaching reading exists for every child and that all a teacher need do is find the right method or wait for the educational industry to provide it—together, of course, with the infallible "test" that will match every child with the best method.

There are trivial but quite valid objections to any random, trial-and-error, hit-or-miss imposition of materials in the hope that one will brush the child with the magical dust of reading.

There is no guarantee that any method will be an improvement on the one before, and there is no test, no set of evaluation procedures, to help teachers make reliable choices. We tend to overlook the damage and despair that constant exposure to different instructional methods, and repeated failure, can produce in a child. We tend to forget that many millions of children learned to read without the benefit of the techniques and technology we have today, let alone those we hope to have tomorrow. Many children have learned in classrooms at least as large as those around today, with desks nailed down in rows, and using abysmally printed and sanctimoniously written material. Rather than devote so much time—and sanguine hope—to how children will learn to read in the great new days of the future, it would be more instructive to examine how children learned to read in the bad old days of the past.

A more serious objection to dependence on methods and materials than the fact that it is unrealistic is that it reflects a totally distorted view of what is required to improve the quality of instruction. The focus is all wrong; it should be on the child, not on the instructional materials. In fact the common critical inadequacy of all my twelve precepts is that they fail to take any account of the child's point of view. They are all directed to the question of what the teacher ought to do, not what the child might be trying to do.

I hope to make my point clearer as I turn from the negative and attempt to summarize in a positive way the alternative I have to offer, difficult though I promise it will be.

One Difficult Rule for making Learning to Read Easy

I shall introduce a brief transitional stage in my progression from the easy to the difficult. I offer a guideline, a bridge to my one rule for making learning to read easy. The guideline is this: *The only way to make learning to read easy is to make reading easy.* My guideline may appear banal to the point of meaninglessness but it must be justified before I go on to the difficult rule, which otherwise might appear even more pointless.

Learning to read is a complex and delicate task in which almost all the rules, all the cues, and all the feedback can be obtained only through the act of reading itself. Children learn to read only by reading. Therefore, the only way to facilitate their learning to read is to make reading easy for them. This means continuously making critical and insightful decisions—not forcing children to read for words when they are, or should be, reading for meaning; not forcing them to slow down when they should speed up; not

requiring caution when they should be taking chances; not worrying about speech when the topic is reading; not discouraging errors. . . .

But I do not intend to offer a collection of proscriptions in exchange for the prescriptions that I have so destructively criticized. The simple point is that the twelve easy rules all make reading more difficult, and reading is a difficult enough task already. The twelve golden rules are dross.

The skill of riding a bicycle comes with riding a bicycle. We do not offer children lectures, diagrams, and drills on the component skills of bicycle riding. We sit them on the saddle and use a guiding hand or training wheels to make sure they do not fall off while they teach themselves the precarious art of keeping balance. Forcing them to worry about laws of motion and centers of gravity would obviously confuse them.

Making learning to read easy means ensuring cues at the time a child needs them, ensuring feedback of the kind required at the time it is required, providing encouragement when it is sought. Making learning to read easy requires an understanding of the reading process and of what the child is trying to do.

Now I have reached my one difficult rule, the antithesis of the twelve easy ways: *Respond to what the child is trying to do.* To my mind, this rule is basic. There is no alternative. The rule recognizes that the motivation and direction of learning to read can only come from the child and that learners must look for the knowledge and skills they need only in the process of reading. Learning to read is a problem for the child to solve. Glance back at all my twelve easy rules and you will see that none of them is really concerned with what the child is doing—at the most only with what a remote authority suggests the child should be doing.

Obviously, my one rule is difficult. It requires insight, tolerance, sensitivity, and patience; it demands an understanding of the nature of reading, a rejection of formulae, less reliance on tests, and more receptivity to the child. Its main demand is a total rejection of the ethos of our day—that the answer to all our problems lies in improved method and technology—and of the emphasis on method that pervades almost all of teacher-training.

The last thing I want to do is imply that teachers have been doing everything wrong. Quite the reverse, my interest is in the fact that for so long, with so many children, teachers have been doing things that are obviously right.

Nothing I have said can change the world as it was yesterday. Any method, any approach to reading instruction, that worked before this essay was written is obviously still going to work after

it has been subjected to a critical review. Yesterday's methods might even work a little better if we get some insight into what really made them effective.

Most teachers are eclectic; they do not act as brainless purveyors of predigested instruction. (That is why there is the frightening trend these days to produce "teacher-proof" materials.) In short, teachers—at least the best of them—are good intuitively. They are effective without knowing why. The word *intuitive* may sound vague and unscientific; it is a word that is widely discredited, but mainly I think because the quality of intuition is not well understood. Here is an off-the-cuff definition of *intuition*: a responsiveness to the intangible forces and motivations that largely determine the manifest nature of events. Put in psycholinguistic terms, intuition implies access to underlying structure without awareness of the grammar relating this structure to the physical events that impinge directly upon our senses. More colloquially, intuition is a feel for what is really going on. In terms of reading instruction, intuition is a sensitivity for the unspoken intellectual demands of a child, encouraging and responding to hypothesis-testing.

The good intuitive teacher, in other words, is one who instinctively ignores the twelve easy rules.